SOME POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS IN CURRICULUM-MAKING[1]

AGAINST the first resolution I felt impelled to prepare a philippic, but knowing that Superintendent Nightingale had pronounced one, and feeling sure that he had another ready for today, and learning that Professor O'Shea would dissent emphatically from the resolution, I concluded that a fourth philippic would be superfluous.

While philosophers and theorists may discuss and determine what studies shall be pursued during the six years beginning with the secondary school, I desire to direct your attention to another phase of the question, the practical side rather than the theoretical; for theorize as much and as we may, unless our theories are practicable the results will be of little value. What I shall say applies more especially to secondary education in the larger cities. Private schools and endowed academies are their own masters and can arrange their work as they may think best.

The fact that this question is before this association the second time is clear evidence that something is wrong, if not radically wrong, at least very unsatisfactory. These resolutions propose to remedy the difficulties by means of certain courses of study. The original resolution on the face of it limits the studies to language and mathematics, a scheme which would be accepted, perhaps, in Madrid. The substitute proposes five lines of work:

1. Language.
2. Mathematics.
3. History and literature.
4. Natural and physical science.
5. Civics and economics.

Professor O'Shea proposes that every student in the secondary school and college shall be required to pursue studies dealing with social relationships, interpreted to include history, literature, the vernacular, psychology, and sociology, making these studies preëminent;

[1] Read before the North Central Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools, April 2, 1898, in opening the discussion on the fourth resolution of 1897, and the substitute proposed. (See p. 307.)

studies in science biology being emphasized in the beginning; a foreign language and mathematics as a means. In the secondary school he prescribes seventeen hours of work a week and three elective; in the college the first year eleven hours of work are prescribed and six elective; in the second year nine hours are prescribed and eight elective.

I have no controversy with him as to the work proposed for the college. As to the work proposed for secondary pupils I am decidedly in a doubting mood. I necessarily look at it from the standpoint of a principal of a large high school. I am wondering how I can obtain the proper facilities to teach biology to 350 boys and girls fourteen years of age. I am also wondering how I am going to persuade these same boys and girls, who, thus far, have done very little real studying, to prepare well seventeen lessons a week and elect to prepare three more. Will someone, someone who has really done it, tell me how to do it? I doubt, too, very much the propriety of making sociology a study in the secondary school. Teach it incidentally through history and literature, but as a science I believe we will do well to wait, at least, until sociologists can agree among themselves. I am in the habit of saying that some studies belong to the college curriculum, and I believe sociology and psychology are two of them. As to the electives if they are confined to the last two years of the secondary curriculum I agree. In my judgment, however, up to the third year of the secondary school, there should be no options. The work should be definite and required for all. Definite work is necessary if we would have definite thinking and writing. The shotgun is used enough before the secondary school is reached.

I do not know of any reputable school with a curriculum limited to language and mathematics, hence I shall not consider the conditions necessary for such an institution.

To make the original resolution the basis of the curriculum for the secondary schools would revolutionize them and put them under the educational régime of fifty or a hundred years ago; and declare that the recommendations of the "Committee of Ten" are unphilosophical and foolish. To make the substitute the basis would be simply to endorse mainly the work now done in our secondary schools; so that perhaps the difficulty is not wholly in the subjects of study. If not, we must look elsewhere for the cause of the unrest.

For students who expect to enter college I believe two languages

besides the English should be required; such a knowledge of mathematics as is implied by a mastery of plane geometry, and of a good academic algebra; the history of the eastern nations and Greece, Rome, France, England, and America; civics and historical economics emphasizing the historical element; and in science, physical geography and elementary physics. The study of English through its literature should have several periods every week. In Columbus English is required of every pupil four periods a week through the four years.

The work I have outlined ought to be done in every good secondary school, and no less amount ought to be considered. The student who thoughtfully and conscientiously completes it not only has a good preparation for college, but he has a good education. I am aware that there is a great deal of work in this outline, but I believe the work can be done in every good secondary school, provided. (1) if the pupils are properly prepared; (2) if the period of secondary school work were longer.

1. Are the pupils properly prepared? When pupils enter our high schools "without knowing a noun from a verb," when "no more than 25 per cent. of them can spell correctly ten words selected from the first reader of a six-year-old child," when most of them will persist in making a predicate noun after "is" its object, it is useless for anyone to contend that our boys and girls come to the high schools properly prepared. Something is wrong. A few years ago I ventured, in one of my thoughtless moods, to make similar assertions in regard to the preparation of pupils for the high school in arithmetic, to the teachers and superintendents of one of the most important central states. I had hardly sat down when nearly every superintendent in the room was on his feet clamoring for recognition to reply. It was the truth that hurt.

The teachers are not altogether to blame. The trouble lies deeper. The fault is in the system, in the curriculum, and in those who are considered the best teachers. That this charge may not rest entirely upon my own assertion I quote from a letter from one of the clearest thinkers of the century, a leading educator and a man of wide experience and observation: "My own judgment is, that one of the serious errors of the last quarter of a century in the arrangement of the curriculum for the public school is its broadening. This leads naturally, and, in my judgment, has led very extensively, to superficial training. I cannot believe that the training in fundamentals and essentials is

today quite up to the standard of a quarter of a century ago. Too much is constantly being done in the way of removing difficulties from the path of the student. The teacher who makes things easy, pleasant, and interesting is supposed to be the best teacher;" and, he might have added, there is thus always a tendency to conceal the real difficulties of a subject, and, still further, to do the work for the pupil in case the difficulty cannot be avoided or concealed. I doubt not that high-school teachers and college professors could give numerous illustrations of this fact, of pupils who, having come to the high school and to college with high rank as scholars have acknowledged that they had never known what it was to master the difficulties of any subject.

Then, further, the present system or organization requires certain things to be done at a certain time whether the pupils have reached the proper age or not. Much of the work attempted in the eighth grade could be *well* done in less time a year or two later. For example, physical geography, the application of arithmetic, and grammar, should we expect boys and girls at the age of thirteen to master these subjects? A young woman who passed through all the grades of the Columbus schools and since has completed the arts course in one of our best colleges for women, told me of finding, just before she left home for college, a paper she had written in an examination at the end of the eighth grade upon physical geography. She said it was Greek to her, both the questions and answers. She wondered how she was able then to write such a paper, and only accounted for it on the ground that she had committed the matter to memory without knowing even what the words meant. She claimed also that she was just as much in the dark upon many of the subjects in arithmetic and grammar. And yet she ranked No. 1 in her class.

Again, much of the work begun in the ninth grade should begin at least a year earlier, and could with great advantage. All the conferences arranged by the Committee of Ten urged that the elements of their several subjects should be taught earlier than they are now. The most of our difficulty, then, is, I believe, the result of the superficial character of the training in the fundamentals and essentials, and the unphilosophical arrangement of the work, mainly in the eighth and ninth grades. The statement that the character of the training given in the fundamentals and essentials is superficial, and the result of broadening the curriculum implies the remedy.

The difficulties in the eighth and ninth grades will not be removed by the introduction of algebra and Latin into the eighth. It will only aggravate them. The reason is evident to anyone who is acquainted with the qualifications of our eighth-grade teachers. As long as we have four primary grades, four grammar grades, and four years in the high school, pupils will come to us indifferently prepared, and, in consequence, 40 or 50 per cent. of them will continue to disappear during the first year of their high-school life.

Some other change must be made by which the work of the eighth and ninth grades may be arranged upon a more philosophical basis and the pupils placed in a new and different environment. The change I recommend is the lengthening of the period of secondary school work, not by adding to it, but by reorganizing the school so that the secondary or high-school teacher shall take entire charge of the instruction of his pupils at least one year earlier. To accomplish this most desirable result the following plan is submitted:

1. Strike from our school nomenclature the word high, and have twelve grades, as now, making no distinction, however, except in the character of the work required.

2. Establish schools *solely* for the eighth and ninth grades, with a thoroughly educated and trained corps of teachers.

3. Maintain schools for the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades in buildings equipped with teachers and laboratories for advanced work.

4. Maintain a manual training school for those pupils who have completed the work of the eighth and ninth grades and desire such a training. This, however, is not an essential part of the plan.

This plan, while I do not offer it as a panacea for all the deficiencies of the school system, would, I believe, remove many of the most serious difficulties which students and teachers of the secondary school now find in their path. Certainly the work of the eighth and ninth grades could be arranged more in accordance with sound pedagogic principles, and give strength where there is now great weakness. This is evident and need not be elaborated.

The period of secondary school work being lengthened, any previous faulty preparation would not be felt in the same degree as now.

The fact that these two grades constitute a separate and distinct school is important. The eighth grade is in a new and entirely different environment, and the ninth is removed from a school whose

management and instruction are necessarily dominated by that of the higher grades.

The plan would be comparatively economical, especially for those cities that, on account of the rapid increase in high-school registration, are multiplying their high schools. The eighth and ninth-grade school buildings would cost much less than the regular high-school buildings, as no expensive laboratories would be needed.

Finally, the work of the schools would be unified. There would be no decided break from the first grade to the twelfth, as now between the eighth and ninth. Some of the work begun in the seventh grade, or even before, could be continued through the ninth, and Latin and algebra could be commenced in the eighth year under competent instruction. The dovetailing would be quite complete.

I have said that the manual training school is not an essential part of the plan. It is not essential *to* the plan, but I believe that every system of education, in this age of the world, is incomplete if it does not provide a good school for manual training. The victories of the next century will be industrial victories, and the people that neglects this branch of education, before another hundred years roll round, will be as poor, weak, and useless as the Spaniards.

The success of the plan will depend very much upon the character of the teachers of the new eighth and ninth-grade schools. They should have superior qualifications and be of the finest quality. The authorities should with the greatest care select the principal, acquaint him with the work to be done, and then authorize him to employ his teachers. In fact, every competent principal of a secondary school should have this responsibility thrust upon him. This *would* be the rule if members of boards of education exercised the same business sense in public matters as they do in their own private affairs—if they were as careful of the public money as they are with their own. Let this be the rule in the appointment of the teachers of these schools, and the success of the plan would be assured.

So far as this plan is concerned, my paper is theoretical. To my knowledge, it has never been tried, certainly not in any large city. I believe, however, that it is feasible, and that it would enable the secondary school teachers to carry out any curriculum more easily and more efficiently and with greater satisfaction to themselves and to the college, whether the curriculum be based upon the original resolution, the substitute, or the substitute as amended by Professor O'Shea. I

believe, further, that the first city that puts the plan into operation will be a Mecca for all progressive educators. I make no apology for presenting this aspect of the question; for you may have the most complete, the most philosophic, and the most progressive curriculum that may be devised, unless we have the proper facilities, and an organization based upon philosophical principles, the results are sure to be unsatisfactory.

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